



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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WSDA to hold public hearing on proposed Commission Merchants licensing fees

OLYMPIA – The Washington State Department of Agriculture’s Commission Merchants Program needs to increase its licensing fees so it can continue its oversight of businesses that purchase crops and livestock from Washington farmers and ranchers.

“Those who purchase agricultural products from Washington state producers for resale must be licensed and, in most cases, have a bond,” said Bob Radke, WSDA’s investigations supervisor. “We work hard to ensure that Washington producers are protected from unscrupulous business practices.”

A public hearing on a proposed increase in licensing fees is scheduled for 1 p.m. on April 6 at the WSDA office’s main conference room, 21 North First Avenue, Yakima. The proposal increases the licensing fees for commission merchants, dealers, brokers, cash buyers and agents that handle agricultural products from Washington producers for resale, such as packing houses or hay dealers.

The proposed fees for a Commission Merchant or Dealer license will be increased to \$450 from \$357. Limited Dealers will pay \$250 instead of \$198, Brokers \$300 (\$249) and Cash buyers \$100 (\$79). Businesses may be licensed in more than one class; the fee for each additional license will remain \$25.

“The Commission Merchants Program is funded entirely by fees generated by the program. We haven’t raised licensing fees since 1995 and the program will face insolvency in about two years if we don’t take action now,” said Jerry Buendel, manager of the Commission Merchants Program.

In the last five years the program has recovered \$5.7 million for Washington producers.

“We mediate disputes, claim bonds and file cases with the county prosecutors to help producers recover in circumstances where they have not been paid for their crops,” Radke said. “We deal with everything from bad checks to bankruptcies to disagreements over product quality.”

Last year program investigators teamed up with the Washington State Patrol at the commercial vehicle weigh stations to make sure trucks carrying agricultural products were licensed and to monitor compliance with agricultural rules and regulations. According to Radke, investigators will be stepping up enforcement and their presence at the weigh stations in 2005.

Written testimony on the proposal can be sent electronically, by mail or by fax to Henri Gonzales, Washington State Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, WA 98504, FAX: (360) 902-2094 or e-mail: hgonzales@agr.wa.gov. Written testimony must be received by April 6. The tentative adoption date of the proposed rule is April 20, 2005.

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